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ABSTRACT

In an effort to stimulate discussion and provide a tool for policymakers and practitioners in developing effective child-centered programs that protect children from hazardous and exploitative labor, this paper examines ways in which work can contribute to, as well as harm, children's development; it also aims to provide a conceptual framework for assessing whether work is helpful or harmful to children. The paper explains how involving working children themselves in policy and action to address their problems results in more effective action and contributes to children's development. Noting that treating working children as intelligent and resourceful, and developing solutions in conjunction with them, may strengthen their psychological development and ability to cope with difficulties, the paper maintains that child-centered action on child labor requires concerted action by governments to address poverty, provide quality education, and implement laws protecting children from abuse. Such action also requires public awareness-raising and changing attitudes so that employers and parents match children's responsibilities with their capacities; so that policymakers, practitioners, and consumers differentiate between developmental and harmful work; and so that working children's views are solicited and used. The paper concludes with a range of practical ways to ensure that any work that children do is safe and healthy for them and promotes their development. These include specific measures that employers can take, an enhanced role for trade unions in ensuring that children of legal working age are protected in the workplace, and suggestions for educational changes to increase its effectiveness for and relevance for working children. (KB)

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promoting the best interests of working children

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William Myers and Jo Boyden

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William Myers and Jo Boyden

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FOREWORD

There is a fast growing international consensus that the most hazardous and exploitative forms of child labour should be the top priority for action. Most recently, the ILO has proposed a new convention designed specifically to focus more forceful attention on child slavery, exposure to great physical hazard and other extreme forms of child labour. International conventions of this type set a legal framework for addressing priority problems. Their effective implementation depends on several factors, including: political will; adequate resources; accurate criteria for identifying abusive situations; and effective action to address both causes and consequences of child labour. This paper addresses the latter two issues, arguing that a child-centred approach, focusing on the needs and capacities of working children, will promote their best interests in a way that conventional approaches, aiming primarily to keep children out of the workplace, do not.

The paper is intended to contribute to the development and mainstreaming of a child-centred approach in policy and action on child labour. The authors, William Myers and Jo Boyden, explore what it means to promote "the best interests of the child", a key principle of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. They draw on recent social science research to examine the different ways in which work can contribute to, as well as harm, children's development. By focusing on the implications of work for children's development, the paper aims to provide a conceptual framework for assessing whether work is helpful or harmful to children, and thus for designing interventions accordingly. A key aspect of this is to analyse specific situations carefully, rather than assuming that particular forms of work are detrimental or beneficial to children's development.

This paper explains how involving working children themselves in policy and action to address their problems not only results in more effective action that is sensitive to local context, but also can contribute to children's development itself. By treating working children as intelligent, resourceful people, rather than as deviants and victims, and by developing solutions to their problems in conjunction with them, their psychological development and ability to cope with difficulties may be strengthened.

Child-centred action on child labour will not happen in a vacuum. It requires concerted action by governments – to address poverty, provide good quality education and to implement laws protecting children from abuse. It also requires public awareness-raising and changing attitudes throughout societies, so that employers and parents match children's responsibilities with their capacities; so that policy-makers, practitioners and consumers differentiate between developmental and harmful work; and so that working children's views are solicited and used to inform action along with those of other stakeholders, rather than ignored.

The paper concludes with a range of practical ways to ensure that any work that children do is safe and healthy for them and promotes their development. These include specific measures that employers can take, an enhanced role for trade unions in ensuring that children of legal working age are protected in the workplace, and suggestions for changes in education to increase its effectiveness for and relevance to working children.

It is intended that this paper will stimulate discussion and provide a tool for policy-makers and practitioners in developing effective child-centred programmes which protect children from hazardous and exploitative forms of child labour, and enable other forms of work to contribute to their development and well-being.

International Save the Children Alliance

INTRODUCTION

In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Article 3, the Convention on the Rights of the Child

By ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), almost every country in the world has accepted that this fundamental principle, the best interests of the child, should guide its policies and activities in regards to children. It is so obvious that action to protect children should be in their best interest that this clause could appear to be unnecessary. However, it was included because the treaty's drafters were aware that even measures specifically intended for the benefit of children often fail to explicitly consider what is best for them. It is in fact common for legal, economic and other claims of adults to take precedence when deciding what should be done for children requiring protection. When this happens, children may become victims rather than beneficiaries of measures supposedly intended to assist them. This problem has been widely recognized in diverse legal matters such as the custody of children in the wake of divorce, the sentencing of young offenders, and the handling of child abuse committed by family members.

A similar situation exists in regard to children's work, which in recent years has become a highly visible child rights issue of major concern to governments, child defense groups, trade union and employer associations, international organizations and, in many places, the public at large. Seldom before has child work been so much the focus of international interest. However, just as this concern has intensified, new research – including in Europe and North America – suggests that the laws, policies and activities most typically employed to guard against child abuse and exploitation in the workplace do not effectively protect most children.[1]

Unfortunately, traditional interventions such as minimum age laws, public sector inspection of workplaces and labour practices, control of children's work through work permits, and compulsory school attendance up to a stipulated age are not producing the expected benefits to children. First of all, these measures are not keeping children out of the labour market, or even out of jobs prohibited by law, except in some portions of the formal sector. Second, they have not proved to be very effective at keeping children in school; other incentives and disincentives turn out to be far more influential in determining school enrolment and attendance. Third, and perhaps most importantly, it is not at all clear that, even if they had their intended effect of eliminating most child work and ensuring school attendance, the result would be beneficial for all children. Work of the right kind can be beneficial for children, and some schools are so discouraging or oppressive that they actually do harm to their students.

Traditional approaches have been shown to work poorly not only in developing regions, but also in the rich nations which invented and exported them to the rest of the world. In countries such as Britain and the United States a significant proportion of children continue to work unprotected, often illegally, and sometimes in activities which present a serious threat to their health and well-being.[2] The rich countries are nevertheless those who have most insisted that these same approaches be applied in developing countries. In some cases these measures have been imposed in counterproductive ways that actually worsen the situation of working children they are intended to protect. For example, in Bangladesh and Morocco, forcing children out of factory work without providing their families with viable economic alternatives has in many cases had the effect of increasing family poverty and leaving children even more vulnerable. Moreover, many children have ended up not in school, but in jobs far more hazardous than those they held originally.[3] Such distortions come from treating child work too narrowly as a just a labour-market issue, or perhaps a school attendance or public safety problem, when in fact it should be regarded far more broadly as a matter of children's development and relationship to society.

Conventional approaches are not always helpful for maintaining a proper sense of priorities. Since human and financial resources are not adequate to extend full effective protection to all children at once, the key question is which children merit special protective

attention. By common sense, severe violations of children's rights should be at the top of action priorities and among the first to receive protective assistance from government and civil society organizations. Indeed, some children are engaged in work that is so life-threatening, demeaning, or damaging to their well-being and development that their situation calls out for urgent action. But it is now clear that children toiling in the very worst of conditions tend to receive relatively little protective assistance, while most world attention and most legal and other protective action is focused on the small minority of children who work in the urban formal sector, and who are for the most part far better off. Furthermore, most international concern has lately centred on child workers in developing country industries that manufacture goods for export to rich countries. This group is very small – by most estimates well under five per cent of working children – and generally not in the more detrimental types of work. This reversal of proper priorities needs to be remedied.

The limitations and failures of the conventional approach to children's work have been widely noted and recognized. The operational issue is what to do about them. Some push for increased political and other efforts to make conventional policies work as hoped; others suggest that new concepts and strategies must be adopted.[1] It seems increasingly clear that merely tightening up current policy or programme planning and implementation would not make a significant difference, for the problem stems as much from misguided ideas as from inappropriate practice. Behind failed policies and practices one often can discern basic conceptual faults in understanding children and the significance of their work, in diagnosing problematic situations, and in defining the objectives and strategies of action. Nor would it be helpful to simply mobilize more public will and resources against child labour if they are to be invested only in expanding what already has proved inadequate to the task.

Accumulating evidence at this time suggests that new concepts are required at least to complement the traditional approach to child work, and perhaps to replace it altogether. Achieving change in policy and practice so that the children involved in the most hazardous and exploitative work receive first priority, others are not needlessly thrown out of work and all children have access to education, will require educating the public, including in rich countries. It will also be necessary to replace a narrow view of child work as a labour exploitation issue with a broader appreciation of it as a critical influence on the growth and development of perhaps most of the world's children.

A NEW CHILD-CENTRED APPROACH

What is required is a more promising vision of the relationship between children and work, a different approach posing new questions that open the way to more effective protection of working children's best interests. Such an alternative does in fact exist, and it is attracting attention from many who believe that children's best interests should be the first and central concern of all policies and programmes concerned with children's work. The ideas behind this approach are being generated mainly by child rights advocates and grass roots practitioners working with working children in the South and by psychologists, economists and social scientists in the North with an interest in developing measures that better respond to working children's problems and needs.

This new approach is rigorously child-centred, taking as its point of departure the child, how the child experiences work, and what the child needs to thrive and develop. It judges the appropriateness of work, and of interventions in work, according to their verifiable effects on children. Its cardinal rule is that all children be treated with full respect for their rights, opinions, potential and individuality. In the specific case of working children, it begins from a position of respect for their persons, for the contribution they make to their families and communities, and for their right and capacity to shape their own lives. It arrives at decisions about children's work, and what should be done about their work, by starting with an in-depth consideration of the children involved. It develops a response to children's work problems in collaboration with the children and on the basis of what is best for them.

This perspective differs substantially from the more traditional one, which is more likely to be triggered by concern about child participation in adult labour markets and to take its action cues from national laws, business operating policies and other frames of reference external to the needs of the children involved. Starting out by inquiring who working children are and what they need emphasizes different issues than does the question of whether children working conforms to social expectations. Importantly, it also makes it possible to identify and prioritize work that is exploitative or hazardous for children and therefore more fully expresses the intent of the CRC.

A number of factors contribute to the emerging enthusiasm for a child-centred approach to child work issues. One, already mentioned, is the growing influence of the CRC on both national and international ideas about protecting children. Even where its letter is not implemented, the spirit of the CRC often holds sway, especially its insistence on the primacy of children's best interests. A second important cause is the expanding quantity and quality of empirical information about child work and working children. This new information increasingly challenges popular assumptions and misconceptions that have long afflicted the conventional wisdom and are responsible for many of its failures. New insights arise from fresh questioning, and research and experience are now expanding our understanding of what makes children vulnerable and are indicating principles and strategies that seem to lead toward their successful protection. Some surprising findings from child-focused studies are changing old assumptions about why children work, the effects of work on children, and the impact of different protection strategies on different groups of children. Some of the more important studies are so new that they are only now being published, or are still in the process of preparation.[5]

Working children themselves are a third, quickly growing, influence on thinking about child work. In a few countries their influence has been felt for a decade or more, but in most places working children's participation in public discussion of child work is still a novelty. However, it is increasingly clear that working children's views cannot be taken for granted; they have unique knowledge and opinions about their situation that must be taken into consideration if measures to protect them are to succeed. Partly for that reason, and partly to conform with requirements of the CRC, working children and their own organizations have recently begun to be more widely included in local and, to a lesser extent, national and international processes that advocate or develop policies and programmes to protect children against workplace abuse and exploitation.

While this short paper cannot convey the wealth of new experience, information and ideas emerging from child-centred views of children's work, it is possible to identify a few of the insights and principles that are most fundamental. Beginning action with these considerations can help steer policy makers, programme planners and children's advocates into channels of thought and activity that reflect children's realities and best interests.

UNDERSTANDING WORK IN CHILDREN'S LIVES

A child-centred approach begins by carefully studying the specifics of children's work. The first question it asks is: "What role does work play in the lives of different groups of children, and what are its positive and negative effects on them?" This question starts from the realization, strongly supported by children's own testimony and by recent studies of working children,[6] that work is typically either healthy or harmful to children according to its context and conditions, and it recognizes that the same kind of work may have very different effects on different children. Girls and boys, for example, or younger and older children, may experience work in very different ways, as may children from different cultural or familial contexts. Work that is harmless or beneficial to some children may be harmful to others. In most cases, therefore, the key issue in the protection of children is not the fact that children engage in work, but the nature of their work situation, how work affects them, and how it relates to other aspects of their lives, especially family life. It is essential to understand thoroughly the meaning of work for children, and its advantages and disadvantages for them, before intervening in it. This information not

only indicates whether action is required, but also suggests the points and means of intervention that are most effective for protecting working children's best interests.

The role of work in children's lives is often complex and ambiguous, commonly having both positive and negative effects. It may, for example, secure the family's – and the child's – survival but at the same time pose a threat to the child's education. Children may regard work as a burden of necessity owing to poverty, and yet value it as a learning experience and a chance to gain family and self esteem. Even though many children are bound to soul-killing drudgery that may be demeaning and dangerous as well, the data also indicate that many children work because they want to. Some do it for spending money, others because they like the excitement and companionship it offers, and still others because they value the learning experiences it affords.[7] Girls often say that work offers them a way out of oppressively traditional homes and into the more modern lifestyles they wish to adopt. It is impressive how many developing country children express pleasure in being able to assist their families through their work, a sentiment rarely found among working children in rich countries. The point is that work has many roles in the lives of children, and the popular assumption that most children, even poor children, are but passive victims of poverty forced to work purely out of necessity is not born out by the reality. And, of course, poverty can hardly be the explanation in rich countries where working children and adolescents are overwhelmingly from the middle class rather than the poor. A child-centred approach recognizes the diversity of meanings that work may have in children's lives, and tailors its interventions to fit the situation. That is why it starts out by ascertaining the often complex relationships between children's work and their education, family acceptance, food intake, self-esteem, health, rest, play and other important aspects of their lives. Children's best interests are inextricably connected to the specifics of their situation.

But understanding the nature and social context of children's work does not all by itself reveal where the best interests of children lie. The abstract concept of 'children's best interests', as it is presented in the CRC, is too vague to be much of a guide to action until it can be grounded in solid indicators applicable to real-life situations. CRC Article 32, which deals specifically with child work, can be helpful in generating useful indicators, by tying them to children's well-being and development. It provides for

> *"the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development."*

By inference, work detrimental to children's education, health or physical and psychosocial development would, by CRC standards, be inconsistent with their best interests. On the other hand, work which promotes their welfare and development could be considered consistent with their best interests. Without denying the occasional exception, it is difficult to imagine seriously harmful work generally being in children's best interests, or developmentally beneficial work violating them. If one accepts this rule of thumb, the next question is a methodological one: how to go about assessing work to determine its impact on children's well-being and development. We will consider that issue separately for children's physical and psychosocial development.

ASSESSING THE PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF CHILDREN'S WORK

Current knowledge about the influence of work on the health and physical development of children is fairly advanced, but it is also uneven. Some forms of impact have been carefully researched while others, equally or more important, have been poorly covered at best.[8] On the positive side, we can at least identify many of the physical dangers that children confront in a number of the more risky occupations and working conditions, and the tools for making health and safety risk assessments are for the most part readily available in the medical community. Practical technology exists to appraise work environments and conduct clinical tests on child workers in such a way as to accurately determine the threats to health and physical safety that

they face. Such studies usually can be done with medical expertise available even in the poorer countries.

To date, most health and safety research has focused on occupations and working conditions already thought likely to pose serious risks to children. These include, for example, hazardous activities involving toxic chemicals, molten metals or glass, very heavy burdens, dangerous machinery or exposure to serious diseases. As would be expected, most of these studies associate work with deleterious health effects, although surprisingly some of the particular effects identified had been previously unsuspected. Also surprisingly, in certain cases the health, nutrition or general physical development of some working children in physically stressful work circumstances have been found unexpectedly normal, or even superior to that of peers who do not work or who work in different occupations.[11] The lesson is to make no assumptions, to collect field data, and to look for both negative and positive effects, short and long term. It is also necessary to discriminate carefully between the short and long term effects of child work and degrees of risk or severity. Exposure to risk is not the same as actual effects, nor is a skin rash of the same importance as life-threatening infections or the loss of limb.

Although we do have a fair and improving understanding of health risks children incur in certain risky occupations and working conditions, we still do not have a very complete picture of the health and physical development impact of the kind of work in which the vast majority of children are engaged, such as housework and small farm agriculture. This crucial information gap prohibits meaningful generalizations about how work most typically affects children's health and development. Available data simply do not support either the assertion that children who work are more likely to be sick or malnourished or the opposite claim that work gives children of the poor improved access to food and health resources and therefore supports their physical development and well-being. Specific case evidence can be found both for and against each position, but neither can at this point in time be sustained as a general rule. However, the fact that we cannot draw global conclusions about the relationships between the work and the physical development of children should not hinder taking action to address particular work situations already known to be detrimental to children's safety, health and physical development. It is not necessary to know about everything in order to start acting on what is already well understood.

ASSESSING THE PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS OF CHILDREN'S WORK

Often the impact of work on children's mental and social development is more pronounced than its effects on their physical growth. Psychosocial effects from children's work can be severely disabling, but they also can be broadly empowering. Some occupations that do not seem very dangerous for children from a purely physical point of view may look quite different when the psychosocial effects are taken into consideration – this has been much observed about domestic service, for example. By the same token, work that carries some physical risks may in certain cases strengthen psychological and educational growth. This raises thorny issues about how to balance negative and positive aspects of children's work when both are present – an extremely common occurrence. Especially when education issues are considered, it comes as no surprise that many experts have concluded that, in a child-centred perspective on children's work, psychosocial development must be an issue at least as important as is physical health and growth.

Nevertheless, until rather recently the psychosocial aspects of childrens' work have received relatively 'ittle attention. One reason is that they tend to be difficult to observe and the tools necessary to discover and analyze them are still incompletely developed and disseminated. While many medical doctors are able to recognize health and physical development effects of work, fewer professionals are equipped to diagnose the psychosocial impacts. Work on this problem is under way, but more is needed, especially the development of diagnostic instruments suitable for use with children, and training of practitioners in their use. Secondly, cause-and-effect relationships are not so clear and mechanical in psychological traumas as they are in the

physical occupational diseases and injuries. Third, psychosocial effects are at least in part determined by cultural and social context, impeding the development of globally applicable conceptual models and assessment tools. Fourth, and most important, there has long been an almost inexplicable lack of interest in the subject of child work by those concerned with children's psychosocial development and well-being. Children as developing beings simply have not been an important concern in the field of occupational health and safety, nor have development psychologists been much interested in children's work, despite the fact that even school children in poor countries frequently spend more time in work than in school.

Because psychosocial issues are so important but so little recognized and addressed in the consideration of child work, it is worth presenting them here in some detail. Moreover, there is a telling gap between popular conceptions of child development and what social science has come to understand about how children develop emotionally, intellectually and socially. This is an important issue because the conventional wisdom, rather than scientific understanding, underlies most child labour policies and programmes, and this may contribute to the limited effectiveness of traditional approaches. Let us compare prevailing popular ideas with the findings of social science.

POPULAR CONCEPTS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Popular notions about childhood and child development generally come from two sources. The first is the particular culture of reference, with all its own values, traditions, child-raising customs and folklore, mechanisms for the socialization of children into the community and so forth. All parents are part of particular cultures which influence not only how they raise their own children, but also their understanding of how people in different cultures raise theirs. This multi-cultural Earth contains a wide variety of ideas about what constitutes childhood and child growth and development, and because children are raised under quite different notions and practices there are in fact many childhoods. Bangladeshi, American and Mozambican children are not raised the same way, do not have the same expectations placed on them, and do not have similar experiences of childhood. Nevertheless, people from all cultures tend to presume that all children are more or less like their own.

The second source of the prevailing concepts of childhood, and one especially influential on educators and other professionals working with children, is a strain of psychological theory arising from research in the first half of this century. The general thrust of this thinking is that child development, including intellectual and emotional development, is a gradual process of maturation through a series of stages toward a fixed end-point (adulthood). Crucially, each stage builds on and is an advancement of the previous one, such that failures in development during the early stages undermine progress later on in childhood. This process is thought to be universal. An important assumption is that childhood is a natural phase of the human life-cycle in which biological and psychological factors have a more important role to play than social or cultural factors. This idea leads to a very particular view of children as largely passive in the face of compelling biological and psychological forces.

In summary, childhood is imagined to be a more or less uniform phenomenon in which intrinsic forces of growth act similarly on all children, even though their expression might vary according to culture. This concept of childhood as a relatively uniform universal phenomenon has left a powerful theoretical legacy whose influence has been expressed internationally in much thinking about universal child rights and protection.

It turns out on further examination that this model contains some hidden assumptions with serious consequences for the way we think about children, the work that they do, and the impact of this work on their lives. For one thing, it reflects the European cultural heritage of most of the researchers and their subjects, which is not a very representative sample of the overall composition and experience of humanity. The children who were the subjects of the most influential studies were mostly middle-class school children in twentieth century industrialized countries where children typically

have relatively little experience of economically productive work. It was their childhood, one of economic dependence and isolation from the adult world, that shaped what came to be considered the developmental norm for all children. As a result, work was taken to be an activity inappropriate for children anywhere, and the school and the home were accepted as the only legitimate settings for child socialization. At the same time, because growth and development was thought to be shaped by a combination of intrinsic physical forces and the socialization efforts of parents, teachers and other adults, children's own contributions to their development were denied.

The idea of a linear pattern of growth and change raised the possibility that children whose development does not conform to this pattern are in some way abnormal or at risk. Because the developmental norm was based on full-time schooling, working children, even those going to school part time, came to be seen either as deviants or victims. The idea that the earliest stages of child development mould development in later stages has given rise to the notion that particularly stressful or traumatic events of early childhood will disrupt or distort children's later development, often with life-long negative effects. Early exposure to hazardous work, for example, is assumed to result in permanent damage to children's psychological development. The idea of preceding stages determining subsequent ones has also led to a research fixation on infancy and early childhood. One effect of this has been a serious neglect of middle childhood (age six to twelve or so), the critical period in terms of children's work. This means that our common understanding of how work affects middle childhood development is not well supported by research, and it is sometimes based on conjecture from studies of younger children's development which have not examined the effects of work.

The upshot of these popular notions about work in relation to child development is that much international policy dialogue and law is based on a model of childhood which treats children as particularly vulnerable, passive objects requiring the special protection of adults. While it is true that in many situations children are exposed to considerable danger and abuse, this model discounts children's capacities for successfully dealing with such situations and their lives more generally. Certainly children do differ from adults physically, psychologically, legally and socially; the CRC makes explicit these distinctions through its exclusive focus on children up to the age of 18 as a social group needing special protection. But the treaty also recognizes that children are strong as well as vulnerable, and that they contribute a good deal to societies in their own right, not simply in terms of the adults they will become.

The overall effect of this picture of childhood is to create a tension between adult obligations to protect children and children's right and ability to participate in their own protection and development. Nowhere is this tension more evident than in the policies and programmes regarding child work. Another feature of this model is its very particular approach to the protection of working children, which quite explicitly juxtaposes education as a positive force for child development and well-being with work, which is taken to be a potential or actual threat. While in many cases this may ring true, it does not reflect the complete and more complex reality of children's work and school experiences, or the multiple effects they have on their lives.

SEEING PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACTS IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT

Without necessarily denying the existence and underlying influence of biological forces in growth and development, recent thinking in developmental psychology stresses the critical importance of the ways in which children relate to their families and others in their social environment.[11] This approach has practically supplanted a universal model because it recognizes and can incorporate the diversity in child development patterns revealed by more recent research. It also helps focus attention on the social contexts of childhood, which is of great importance when considering social policy. But this newer understanding is not widely known by educators, policy makers or the general public because it has not been well disseminated outside the academic circles that have conducted the research on which it is based.

This approach holds that diversity in childhood is an expression not of abnormality but of individual, social and cultural difference. Especially during middle childhood and adolescence – the ages during which children are most likely to work – not only do children from different cultural contexts follow developmental patterns that may be different from those observed in European and American children, but they may grow and flourish in circumstances quite distinct from those of supposedly "normal" children who live in a nuclear family and attend school. Thus, this thinking stresses that there are many routes and dimensions to children's development. Research has shown that children have many abilities and skills, which vary between cultural contexts and are developed by different means. For example, whereas work is in some places considered an unnecessary distraction from the main educational channel (school), in others it is valued as the best source of essential skills not learned in school.

The view of children as beings with many and varied capacities suggests that children play a much more active role in their own development than had been thought. To a surprising extent, development is something that children actively do, not just something that naturally happens to them as they grow older. Within the constraints and opportunities of their environment, children play a major role in creating the sorts of interactions that help them to develop. Because children are not merely passive recipients of experience, but active contributors to their own development, they may seek and value work as a source of learning, social acceptance, independence, feelings of accomplishment and self-worth, or other personal benefits beyond strictly economic considerations. It is important to note that this active role of children in their own development has been found to be itself developmental. It fosters children's self-esteem, their capacity for autonomous thinking and action, and their social competence more generally.[14] Experience of this kind also has powerful protective qualities that help children survive stress and trauma. Children whose sense of personal agency is intact and functioning are more likely to survive adverse circumstances psychologically unscathed than are more passive children who regard themselves as victims.

However, it has also been found that children's sense of agency is very sensitive to how they are regarded by others, particularly adults they deem important, and can easily be undermined. This suggests the importance of understanding child development in the context of the relationship between children and their families, however family is defined. In many societies, work is one of the most important ways in which children integrate into their families, gaining family respect and self-esteem as well as essential household or economic skills. The point is that children develop through and in response to a whole set of family dynamics, which of course differ greatly between cultures. For children to develop confidence as members of their communities, it is important that families, peers, and community convey to them the expectation that they can and will handle their responsibilities successfully and participate in valued ways.[15] The expectation that they will not do so, or social disparagement, on the other hand, damages children's resilience. This finding suggests that the psychosocial protection of working children should start by showing them respect as both persons and workers, especially by making space for them to participate in the solution of their own problems. Its practical policy and programme implications are enormous, and will be taken up again later in this paper.

The role and significance of children's work in their development differs greatly according to which cultural system prevails, and interventions to protect working children's best interests need to take this variance into account. One particularly important area of cultural relativity concerns the ways in which children relate to and are dependent upon the division of family maintenance responsibilities. In societies where family solidarity is essential for children's survival and development, it matters greatly whether a strategy for protecting children's rights reinforces a child's family ties or loosens them. Conventional approaches to child labour often have neglected this consideration to children's detriment. It also is necessary, however, not to be too simplistically pro-family. In some cases children want to work in part to escape from aspects of family life they consider oppressive, and indeed in some traditional gender-discriminating cultures, girls wanting education or a more modern life style have depended on work outside the home to realize these

aspirations. The point is not that the family is always right, but that it is a crucial reference group in which to understand child development and the role of work in it.

The conventional wisdom that trauma and suffering in early childhood impairs development takes account neither of individual differences in children's temperament, intellectual capacity and emotional resilience, nor of the many other factors that mediate childhood experiences, such as the ties with family or the social recognition children receive for what they do. Although a small minority of children are undoubtedly impaired emotionally or psychologically by traumatic experiences, there is little scientific indication that the majority of children are *necessarily* harmed for life by such adversity, especially if their own resilience is reinforced by supportive families or communities.[13] Also, there is evidence of children's ability to develop even through highly stressful circumstances. For example, some research on street children living in difficult circumstances apart from family has found the psychological status and development of most to be surprisingly close to norms for the society, and has identified mechanisms of their lifestyle that seem to reinforce their resilience.[14] On the other hand, children's resilience is not boundless, and recognizing and supporting it should not detract from efforts to identify work that is degrading or dangerous to children or excuse society from providing the basic services and protection all children have a right to under the CRC.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

A child-centred approach to child work issues places high priority on the participation of working children in their own protection. It discourages the popular stereotype of working children as helpless victims, and instead facilitates their individual and collective involvement in decisions and activities on their behalf. This makes good sense for several reasons. First of all, according to recent child development understanding, it helps the children build capacities, attitudes and support systems that increase their resilience. Second, working children's own wits and skills already are their first and sometimes only line of defence, and it is sensible to enable them to defend themselves as well as possible. Third, children have a uniquely close and detailed view of their workplace problems, and therefore have essential information and ideas to share. Fourth, working children or their families can easily undermine policies and programmes they do not trust or agree with, and virtually no action can effectively protect them against their will. Fifth, the CRC demands that children have a voice in deliberations concerning them.

The need to include working children in their own protection is increasingly recognized by NGOs and some governmental and international organizations, and a number of programmes – some of them well-known and long established – have been exploring ways of doing this. Although it is a growing trend, working children's participation in policy and programme efforts to assist or protect them remains a relatively unmapped terrain in which even organizations fully dedicated to facilitating children's rights are still feeling their way only tentatively. Most of the experience accumulated so far is at the community level, but there also have been recent moves to open higher level decision-making processes about children's work to participation from working children themselves. At the national level, for instance, Brazil's large movement of working and street children was instrumental in mobilizing public opinion in favour of a constitutional provision guaranteeing children's rights and a sweeping child protection law to implement them. The movement itself developed out of a highly participative way of working that had originated in grass-roots action.[15] At the international level, working children have for some years gathered in regional conferences in Africa and Latin America. In the last two years children have also been included, albeit marginally, in meetings and conferences discussing new global action against child labour. National and international experiences have demonstrated that children are indeed able to participate and represent their own interests effectively, but they also raise serious methodological questions. Two of these issues are especially important.

The first is that of representation. Not every working child can participate in every action at every level, so some sort of representational approach is needed. One

way to achieve this is through child-centred research, which makes it possible to convey working children's views directly to decision makers. Another way is to consult children where they routinely gather in schools and regular programmes, or to hold special workshops for dialoging with children who are not attached to such institutions. Schools, workers' organizations, and special programmes for child workers would seem to be especially well placed to systematically poll working children for their ideas and opinions.

A rather different approach is through the formation of children's own representational organizations, and several of these have now come into being in various Latin American, West African and South Asian countries. Some of these organizations have been in existence for a long time. In Peru, at least one has been around for over twenty years, and today a national working children's movement encompasses approximately 10,000 members. Working children's organizations assertively press the claim that child participation in policy and programme decision-making should be primarily through children's own organizations having an elective process. They point out that children arbitrarily selected by adults have no credible claim to speak for children as a group, and are more easily manipulated. At the same time, some critics of the working children's movements have questioned the claim of children's organizations to legitimate representativeness, asserting that children from certain occupations predominate because they are easiest to mobilize, and that the youngest children are not properly represented since leaders and spokespersons are normally teen-agers. The children's organizations respond that, while delegates from working children's organizations do not represent all child workers any more than trade unions represent all adult workers, they at least represent the children who elected them, whereas children picked by adults represent nobody.

There is strong evidence that working children's own organizations can be very useful to them in representing their interests in productive ways adult organizations might not. Through them children and youth campaign locally, nationally and even internationally for improvements in their own and other children's conditions of work. Through child-to-child contact, working children in many places help educate others about health and safety at work, how to protect themselves from workplace abuse and where to go for help. This has become a standard method of getting essential protective information out to street children and children working in prostitution, for example. In other cases, children's organizations have been effective advocates representing their members' needs to adults. For example, working children's organizations in Peru successfully pressed and negotiated with the Government for the incorporation of working children into the national social security system providing health care to adult workers. In this case, the children protested their exclusion merely on the basis of age, and demanded just recognition as workers in their own right. They were admitted on this basis, and were authorized to carry identification cards, have rights to services, and make regular payments into the system, as do adult workers. In a few cases, governments have opened spaces for hearing working children. In Senegal, for example, the national union of working children was invited by the Government to sit on the governing council that oversees the national programme for eliminating the exploitation of children. In Brazil, child delegates address the national congress as a concluding activity of an NGO-sponsored national conference of working and street children held every three years. What such examples have in common is that they approach working children not as helpless victims, but with respect and the expectation that they are able to contribute meaningfully to initiatives designed to help them.

A second major issue relating to children's representation is that of adult influence. This has been a question in working children's organizations particularly, because they are sometimes accused of being manipulated by adults. This issue arises from the fact that adult support is essential to such organizations. One reason is that children grow up, and since they are working children for only a few years they are at a disadvantage in guaranteeing the continuity of their own organizations. Adult support helps provide that needed continuity. Also, in many societies children are legally prevented from forming registered organizations, opening bank accounts or renting buildings. Adults must in these cases assume the legal responsibilities.

In some instances, adults actually founded the organizations in order to create social and political spaces for working children, and they remain necessary as legal representatives and as facilitators whose role is to constantly help train and encourage new children to participate. Children's organizations, as with other forms of participation, are a particular kind of partnership between children and adults rather than a form of generational exclusion. But it is a demanding sort of partnership in which adults play a self-limited role aimed at the empowerment of children. Working with children in this way, being effectively supportive without being obtrusive or manipulative, is a difficult and sensitive art that not all adults manage to learn. But many seem to have mastered it remarkably well. Rädda Barnen's recent study of children's participation in several programmes for working children found intentional manipulation of children by adults to be non-existent or rare. However, it also warns that adult influence is powerful and subtle, and that constant vigilance is needed to ensure that children's views and objectives are not buried by adult's own concerns.[17]

As interest increases in children's participation, including through their own organizations, there will be special need for assistance to responsible experimentation and development of the best methods for such participation. There also will be a large task in training adults in the skills of supporting children's participation effectively without distorting it. This is an area in which NGO, bi-lateral and multi-lateral financial and technical assistance could be especially useful.

EDUCATION, WORK AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Throughout the world, most parents and children respect education as an important vehicle of personal growth and development and see it as their main hope for economic and social advancement. By all accounts, the incidence of those not wanting a decent education has been rapidly falling. Practically everywhere demand for education remains high, even among families whose children fail to attend school regularly or drop out early. Beyond promoting social and economic mobility, education of the right kind can inform children about the risks of work and about their rights generally, can empower them to stand up for themselves in cases of abuse and exploitation, and can provide them with viable alternatives to the drudgery of inappropriate work. It can prepare them to be more effective defenders of their own best interests. The question is to what degree education realizes this potential for working children, or at least meets their minimum needs and expectations.

Because of education's undeniably powerful potential, policy makers and child advocates generally believe school to be the most socially desirable activity for children from roughly six to fourteen or more years of age. Most children live in countries that make education compulsory through at least enough years thought necessary to achieve literacy. It is often assumed by policy makers and activists that all schools are developmentally beneficial, at least in academic skills, although some are recognized as being more so than others. In that belief, campaigns against child labour often promote the idea that the place of children in the middle childhood years is universally in school, thereby conveying the ideas that working and attending school are mutually exclusive, and that school is developmental whereas work is not. As an extension of these assumptions, it is often thought that keeping all children in school will keep them from working. These assumptions about the contribution of school to personal development and the mutual exclusiveness between school and work merit closer examination.

Let us take the second issue first. While education is indeed incompatible with work in many instances, recent research suggests that is far from the general rule. In many places work and school co-exist, and in some cases children's schooling depends upon their working. In fact many developing country children work in order to pay for the books, paper and pencil, transportation, examination fees, and sometimes even tuition, necessary to attend school. In some homes so poor that not all the family's children can attend school, older children or girls may work full time so that their siblings can study. The truth is that the relationship between work and education varies enormously according to place and circumstance. For example, a statistical analysis of comparable, high quality household survey data from Pakistan and Ghana

demonstrates that, whereas school and work tend to be mutually exclusive for Pakistani children, in Ghana nearly all working children go to school and receive at least a basic education.[14] They are very different social and cultural systems in the way they handle both work and education. In virtually all countries it is possible to find children who only work or only attend school and children who both work and go to school. Some children manage to integrate the two activities through apprenticeships and work-study programmes, often under the aegis of educational institutions. The child-centred question is not whether work and education go together – they already do all over the world – but how the relationship between them can be made to effectively serve children's best interests.

Returning to the question of how education affects child development, an appraisal of the extensive evidence clearly demonstrates that school, like work, can be either detrimental or constructive for children. It is often both. While most children may gain undeniable benefits from their education, new information is casting light on the often ignored negative aspects of schooling in the lives of many children. Because this dark side of education is not much talked about in the debates about child work, it is worth dwelling on momentarily. When considered in light of recent thinking about child development, the school experience of low-income children in general, and working children in particular, turns out often to be quite detrimental. To begin with, schools in many places do not accomplish even the narrowest academic objective – functional literacy – expected of them. Other important cognitive objectives, such as critical thinking or problem solving, are commonly neglected altogether. Even in Latin America, one of the richest developing regions, recent research has found that half the children leaving school after five or six years cannot read and write. More serious still is the socioeconomic discrimination hidden inside this general statistic: fully 80 per cent of children from the lower half of the income distribution do not become functionally literate.[15] There is no reason to believe Latin America is a unique case.

Some claim that, by detracting from school, child work contributes to this class disparity in school performance. This is undoubtedly true sometimes, but only to a limited extent. While low-income school children are more likely to work, and while heavy work schedules have indeed been shown to lower children's school performance, most research suggests that the great class difference in literacy levels is related to home factors (such as parental education levels) and to the almost universal fact that the amount and quality of education available to poor communities is significantly inferior to that offered the better-off sectors of society. And work, per se, can hardly be the problem in those cases where studies have found the school performance of working children (especially those working about 5-10 hours per week) to be superior to that of their peers who do not work at all.

If the typical schooling experienced by working children is judged by modern criteria of child development, it would appear to contribute surprisingly little to their personal development. Rarely does education policy and practice consider the diverse nature and needs of different groups of children, build on children's existing capacities and target their special needs, provide a variety of opportunities for learning and for developing children's many competencies, or enlist children's own initiative and participation in planning their own development. And when schools fail even to make their students functionally literate, they not only waste children's time but crucially undermine their capacity to defend themselves in increasingly urban-industrial societies. Throughout the world, these shortcomings apply especially to the schooling provided to children from poor communities, the very children most likely to work.

The problem does not stop there. For large numbers of children school is not the kind, safe and happy place many adults assume it is. There is ample evidence that a significant proportion of children globally drop out of school in response to physical or psychological abuse by teachers, humiliation caused by other children, or discouragement at the unproductiveness of sitting in school without learning. In a Rädda Barnen study of working children covering four different regions of the world, over half the children's focus groups cited abusive treatment as a major obstacle to attending school or learning there. They mentioned as common problems verbal abuse, physical beatings, extortion of

money (to obtain passing marks on exams), public ridicule, sexual abuse, and other brutal practices, not to mention teacher absence and neglect.[20] Many other reports from around the world report much abuse of this type being directed specifically at working children, whom teachers frequently consider dirty and poorly dressed, harder to teach, and less submissive than other children.

It is hardly a surprise that so many children abandon school, dissatisfied with the kind of education on offer or distressed by the poor treatment meted out by teachers. Indeed, it is important for policy analysts and decision-makers to understand that inferior and degrading schooling is a major cause of child work, often as or more significant than family poverty. Nor is it a surprise that many children claim to learn as much or more from their work than their school, given the many abilities they need to develop in order to adapt to life in the modern world and the extremely narrow range of academic skills provided by schooling. Recent research certainly warns against automatically assuming all schooling to be developmentally appropriate for the children involved; its value needs to be confirmed by specific observation.

A great deal of work is needed to provide working children, especially girls and children from groups suffering discrimination, with an education that is consistent with their rights, well-being and development. Projects successfully combining work and education for working children in innovative ways have been documented for over two decades, and lately special attention has been paid to programmes that provide scholarships or other subsidies that permit children to reduce or eliminate their workload in favour of school.[21] Much has been learned from such experience, but little of this learning has been transferred from the non-formal education setting, usually in the NGO sector, into ministries of education. In recent years, however, some governments have begun to deal with the problems of making education more accessible and attractive to working children, often with prodding and assistance from NGOs and multi-lateral and bi-lateral development cooperation agencies. This comes at an opportune time, because during the last two years international interest in reaching working and out-of-school children with effective education programmes has been steadily growing. This new attention presents an opportunity for both national and international cooperation, including with NGOs, to develop truly child-friendly education, based in modern concepts of child development, that serves the best interests of children who work.

RECOMMENDATIONS: REFLECTING CHILDREN'S BEST INTERESTS IN POLICY AND ACTION

All actions to protect working children should be firmly rooted in child welfare and development objectives. Only a child-centred perspective based on developmental principles and priorities can be relied upon to promote children's best interests. By focusing policy and programme objectives on children's potential and what is needed to realize that potential, such a perspective keeps interventions from being so short-sighted that they cause long term harm to children they try to assist in the short term. Emergency interventions are indeed sometimes necessary, but they should be planned so that they contribute to the physical and psychosocial well-being and development of the children involved.

A child-centred approach challenges the notion that child work should be addressed primarily as a labour issue, as is now the general rule. It makes much more sense to approach work in terms of its role as an important formative influence in the lives of perhaps the majority of the world's children. This suggests that child work should be regarded less from a legal perspective than in the broader context of children's social ties, aspirations, skills and competencies, and evolving initiative and sense of self worth. Factors such as these are critical in deciding whether work is good or bad for children, and it is difficult to deal with them through legal instruments, which are essentially irrelevant. An outright ban on children working, for example, does not really address the real factors that endanger children in their work, and it therefore serves children's best interests poorly at best. Overall, a child-centred approach would make less use of

minimum age laws, public sector inspection of workplaces and labour practices, compulsory school attendance, and other coercive measures, although these might still have an important role to play. It would instead rely more on mobilizational activities such as poverty reduction, advocacy and campaigning on children's rights, economic and social incentives, participation of children and their parents in policy and programme planning, improvement of school accessability and quality, and the introduction of workplace protections and safeguards for both children and adults. The promotion of children's rights and their protection against child labour abuse is more effectively built up from within a society than imposed upon it by fiat from above.

The concern for protecting children against detrimental work focuses by definition on the negative aspects of work, which is justified by the huge amount of abusive child work in the world. But it is important to keep in mind that the effect of children's work on their development is seldom all negative. Nor is it likely to be all positive. The part time work most children typically do, if it allows them time for rest and school, may on balance have a positive developmental influence even if some negative factors are present. There is no reason to stand in the way of this kind of work, although it it is a good idea to provide for vigilance to ensure that acceptable child work does not degnerate into danger and exploitation. Policy makers, programme planners and children's advocates all need to clearly understand that work can either undermine or promote children's development, based on the circumstances. Whereas work of the wrong kind, as described in Article 32 of the CRC, diminishes a child's development and should be vigorously resisted, appropriate work can help build children's social and economic skills, confidence, self-esteem, and integration into family and community. Enlightened policy, programmes and children's advocacy would sensibly seek to eliminate work situations that endanger children without needlessly curtailing their ability to engage in healthy work.

If the traditional approach centred around blanket prohibitions on children's work is not an effective way to protect most children against workplace danger and exploitation, then what is? More research – especially evaluations of policy and programme outcomes for children – are urgently needed to answer this question in detail, but some general outlines of an alternative set of practices can now be discerned. First and foremost, a child-centred perspective emphasizes that real children and their best interests shall remain the central concern of all action, ensuring that this sharp focus is not displaced or diluted by competing claims from influential groups defending children less than industries or occupations, labour markets, ideological orientations or even national laws and international standards. It insists that, when necessary, the agenda of adult political and economic interest groups must give way to accomodate the needs of children, and that laws and standards must be applied to children's benefit rather than their detriment. Also, a child-centred viewpoint maintains a strong sense of priorities. Rather than becoming distracted by futile attempts to prohibit the work of all children, it directs society's attention and effort to those working children who require protection and assistance, with special intensity to children in the most urgent need. This priority for working children in the most intolerable circumstances is now advocated by the ILO, UNICEF and many NGOs. Finally, child-centred policies and programmes understand and are sensitive to the specifics of circumstance and context. Their interventions accurately reflect and evolve from the nature of the problems being attacked, giving a sense of having been designed from the bottom up rather than imposed from the top down. Their greater effectiveness springs from their relevance and specificity.

Such well-focused approaches are unlikely to either generate or derive from universalized models of intervention. But does this imply that there can be no universal dimensions to the defence of children against workplace abuse and exploitation, and that international instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, are necessarily out of step with children's best interests? Not at all, for many important objectives and principles can be widely agreed, adapting their application to the circumstances, even when specific intervention models for mechanistic replication are not appropriate. For example, more countries could conscientiously subscribe to a firm but

general obligation to abolish seriously hazardous and slavery-like work by children than to a set of universal policies all must adopt toward that end, whether they fit or not. Accountability and the means to monitor can be applied as rigorously to general objectives as to specific policy commitments. The answer to melding universal criteria with the need to respond to children's situational realities is to universalize broad principles, which can be flexibly adapted to differing local needs, rather than uniform policies to be everywhere replicated. Although more evaluative research is needed to better define such principles, experience to date suggests that at least the following can be relied upon to promote working children's best interests:

Base all action on accurate empirical information about children's work and lives

No major policy or programme intervention should be made without a solid understanding of the work, life situation and opinions of the children involved. This means that all interventions in children's work should be founded on accurate empirical information about the nature and conditions of that work, the life situation of the children involved and how their work fits into it, the negative and positive effects of the children's work on their well-being and development, the children's own opinions about their work, and their ideas about protective or other assistance they feel they need. This empirical information should be the first and most important basis for deciding what policies and programmes, if any, are merited.

Most useful empirical information comes from special studies about child work and working children, including surveys of children and their families. In most countries official data about child work are so flawed that they tend to be worthless for policy and programme planning. However, those few countries now collecting child labour data according to new ILO guidelines may produce usable information, and a few countries have processed official household survey information in such a way as to reveal child work and education patterns. One of the most essential sources of information is from working children themselves, and it may be collected either in surveys or through children's self-representation initiatives and organizations (to be discussed below). It is increasingly clear that policies and programmes that do not take children's own perspectives sufficiently into account are likely to perform poorly and perhaps even to be counterproductive. Adults simply do not have all the information that is essential to plan interventions benefitting working children as intended.

Design all policies and programmes to ensure that the children affected are left better off

Children whose rights, well-being and development are truly protected will be left observably better off as a result of interventions on their behalf. While this should be obvious, the fact is that relatively few child labour policies are now planned and implemented in a way that will ensure children are left with more rather than fewer options for their survival and advancement. As a first rule, children's capacity to act on their own behalf should not be unnecessarily abridged. They should be left as much freedom and opportunity as their reasonable protection permits. For children who want or need to work, interventions that make work safe and developmentally appropriate should be favoured over those that exclude them from it. These should include, where feasible, work-study opportunities that coordinate work with school in a developmental framework. When it is necessary to separate children from work for their own protection, alternative activities that meet their developmental and economic needs must be provided. This might mean offering children alternative, more appropriate, employment, or perhaps establishing other family sources of support so as to maintain family income. Subsidies to children to facilitate their reintegration into school or to make it possible for them to benefit from vocational training may be necessary. A more powerful incentive is to be able to offer children the possibility of decent employment when they have reached an acceptable level of education and are of a legal working age, but few countries are today in so fortunate a position.

Where it is children's accepted social role and duty to contribute economically to their family, interventions which prevent them from doing so can weaken their

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ties to their families and damage their sense of self-worth. It is critical therefore that interventions to protect them be designed taking into account the broader social and cultural context. Whenever feasible, even when urgent remedial action is needed, children and their families, teachers, religious leaders, employers, community workers and other key actors in children's lives should be consulted about possible unintended adverse effects of intervention.

Monitor all policies and programmes for their impact on children

It should never be assumed that the impact of policies and programmes to protect working children is entirely positive. All interventions should be routinely analyzed to determine their outcomes in terms of the physical and psychosocial well-being and development of the children they touch. Such evaluations must consult directly with children, their families and their communities. Only those policies and programmes that can be demonstrated to have a beneficial effect on children's well-being and development should be considered successful. Those not meeting this criterion should be reformed or discontinued.

Involve children in planning, implementing and evaluating initiatives on their behalf

Working children should take part in planning, implementing and evaluating activities for their own protection and development. As has been mentioned previously, their participation is both a developmental influence for the children involved and a necessary condition for planning policies and programmes that serve their best interests. For participation to be meaningful, children must be in a position to make informed choices, which also means that they must have the choice whether or not to participate. In order to make good choices, working children need information. Adults need to help provide this or guide them towards it. Working children need to be aware of the consequences of their work and to understand both the opportunities and limitations created by interventions on their behalf. They must acquire the social skills needed for collective discussion, decision-making, and action. The nurture of children's decision making skills need not be reserved only for older children and teen-agers, for younger children too have the capacity to participate in ways and fora appropriate to their age. Children need to see the advantages of taking part, which means they need to participate in real decisions of some importance to them. The benefit need not always be direct; many children are willing to participate in decisions and activities that may primarily help others in the future. In fact, many have noted an unselfish tendency among working children's own groups and organizations to reach out to other children they consider worse off. Through participation children also learn patience and acquire more realistic expectations as they both help plan their own lives and learn that things never go quite according to plan.

Article 12 of the CRC provides for the opinions of children to be heard and considered in matters concerning them, but it does not demand that their wishes prevail. Adults do not relinquish their responsibilities for society's major decisions simply by consulting children. Children's views should be balanced with those of others having an understanding of the situation, for children are not always aware of what is in their best interests. Consultation should not occur in a vacuum, for children are part of a social context in which others also have important viewpoints, and often the power to impose them on children. Therefore, good situation analysis must include an assessment of which people and organizations have a vested interest in children's work, their interest being made explicit. These people need to be seen as potential allies in interventions on children's behalf. Actively involving them in decisions concerning children's well-being helps create support for action and can reduce opposition to incorporating children into planning and decision-making. It is also helpful to include mechanisms for consulting with children that are not participating directly in any programme.

PRIORITIES FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION

Governments concerned to respond more effectively to the problems and needs of working children must first of all bring a more child-centred view of child work into both legislative and administrative policy. They have traditionally treated child labour primarily as a labour market issue, codifying policy within the legal framework that regulates workplaces and entrusting its implementation to the Ministry of Labour. While this is one valid perspective on child work, it is too narrow – as was discussed above – to adequately promote the best interests either of children or of the national society. Child labour can be addressed much more fruitfully for both children and nation as a human development issue. This suggests that child work should be an important topic of consideration in both education and social welfare ministries. A child-centred approach to child work might find its best home, however, in national human resources development policy. Progressive policies of this type seek to conserve the human potential of the country's children and support combinations of education and experience necessary for them to realize that potential. This framework is suitable for building on the positive social, economic and learning value of appropriate work while at the same time actively discouraging child exploitation and abuse.

It is also necessary to deal with the ravages of household poverty. Poverty is not the only reason children do work that is harmful to their well-being and development, but it is one very important factor that also exacerbates others. Poverty reduction measures that can do much to relieve the survival pressures on children and their families include policies more fairly distributing income and tax burdens, land reform and other measures to ensure equitable access to fundamental assets, adequate support for basic services essential to the poor, investment in natural resource management and employment generation to reduce household vulnerability, and micro finance programmes that enable households to establish or improve small enterprises and better manage periods of scarcity.[8]

Government should give top priority to making education accessible and attractive to working children. In fact, many experts feel that the most important single thing that government can do to reduce child labour is to ensure the accessibility of quality basic education to everyone, especially the rural and urban poor. School calendars and schedules need to be made more flexible in order to accommodate children who must work during particular seasons or hours. The introduction of shifts or rescheduling the annual school cycle so that classes do not coincide with periods of peak labour demand can make a big difference for working children. Holding classes in areas where large numbers of children work, rather than in residential zones, can also help. In perhaps most schools serving the poorest populations, education quality and relevance must be improved to ensure that children really benefit from attending school. Schools should be made safe, productive and attractive to children so that they will want to attend, and will learn when there. Special attention should be devoted to eradicating violent and humiliating classroom practices that repel children and threaten their development, replacing them with learning methods (in some places known as "joyful learning") using games, songs, dance, and other activities children love.

Curricula should be based on the situation of the children and be relevant to their everyday concerns, drawing as far as possible on children's own skills and knowledge. Schools can do much to inform children about work risks and how to avoid or deal with them. They can bring children's work experiences into the learning process, utilizing them as a basis for experiential learning that builds on work competencies children already have acquired and applies their new skills and knowledge to solving practical problems. Emphasis should be given to comprehension, critical analysis, problem solving and adaptation to changing conditions and new leaning situations as opposed to the mere acquisition of knowledge or learning by memory. Education planning should take into account working children's capacities, making use of alternative means of learning, including work-study combinations, where desirable and feasible. Learning models that are sensitive to the special needs and achievements of working children, who may be very mixed in terms of aptitude, background, age and experience, need to be devised. Such approaches allow children to practice

and learn on their own terms, using their own language, concepts and understandings. They build children's capacity to deal with new and adverse circumstances and increase their confidence and self-esteem. With education of this type, schools could stop being part of the child labour problem – their failures propelling children into full-time and inappropriate work – and become part of the solution.

WHAT NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS CAN DO

Most of the social vision, political pressure and methodological innovation for protecting children against workplace exploitation and abuse has in the past come from non-governmental organizations. Now they have to play an equally prominent role in making child labour thinking and action more child-centred. In both developing and industrialized countries, they must educate both government and public opinion about the concepts and methods required to address child work in ways serving children's best interests. They also must provide leadership in developing the practical tools and guidelines necessary to implement a child-centred approach. Some of these are now in the process of development, but much more such work is needed. For example, the techniques at present available for distinguishing detrimental from harmless work are not always adequate to the task, especially in regard to the measurement of psychosocial impacts. Urgent priority needs to be given to the development of tools and procedures for assessing psychosocial distress that can be used in different social and cultural contexts. The methodology of working children's participation is another area needing priority attention. Work is needed to collect and analyze current experience and to develop and field test practical procedures for systematically bringing children's views into programme planning and evaluation. Some progress has been made in adapting participatory techniques (for example, Participatory Rural Appraisal) originally developed for adults to the challenge of accurately hearing and recording children's views regarding their work and the usefulness of programmes to assist them, but reliable methods devised specifically for use with children may need to be devised. By extension, there also is a need to create special opportunities and mechanisms for working children's voices to be heard in national and international policy discussions formulating child labour laws and standards, whether through their own representative organizations, school-based consultations, national workshops or other means.

Non-governmental organizations also lead by example. They are uniquely positioned to implement child-centred approaches at the project level, providing living models of what can and should be done. It is here that governments, civil society organizations and the public at large can see new ideas turned into successful practice, and become inspired to extend them more broadly. Developing partnership with such organisations to promote child-centred approaches is critical. Through their support or execution of projects working directly with children, NGOs can lead the way in demonstrating at least three of the most essential elements of a child-centred approach. First of all, they can rigorously base their programmes and advocacy on empirical evidence about children rather than simply on mere suppositions and ideological positions. Secondly, they can experiment with various means for incorporating working children's participation into programme planning, implementation and evaluation. Thirdly, they can open new opportunities for working children to represent themselves and undertake their own initiatives, and they can prepare and assist children to seize those opportunities successfully.

MEASURES WITH AND BY EMPLOYERS

Employers establish the jobs most children perform, as well as the working conditions under which the work is accomplished. They, more than anyone else, hold in their hands the power to change the nature of children's work experience for either better or worse. For that reason alone, it makes sense to persuade and assist employers to protect the well-being and promote the development of any children who work for them. Another reason is that, no matter what the provisions of law, it is almost impossible for labour inspectors or other enforcement agents to penetrate where most children work. Coercion of employers is almost never

an option. It also makes sense to target the kinds of employers for whom most children work, but there is a hidden surprise here, for most employers of children are not the businessmen and factory owners assumed by popular stereotypes. Since the large majority of working children work for or with their families, most employers of children are in fact the children's own parents or other relatives. This is not to be dismissed as irrelevant, for the available evidence does not support the common idea that work for family is safer or less exploitative than is work for outsiders. Protection efforts aimed at employers should focus equally on working children's families and on external employers. Experience has shown that much can be done to educate parents about the health and development risks of certain kinds of work and working conditions and to help them find viable solutions for protecting their working children. There is some evidence that the "pay-off" from working with parents can be especially high,[25] but still surprisingly little effort or investment is now being channeled to this critical activity. It is a vastly underexplored area for creative action.

Domestic servants comprise the largest group of children working outside the home, and nearly all are girls. Many live where they work. Their employers are better-off households, usually the women of the households. There is considerable anecdotal evidence that young house maids and child minders may commonly be subject to a wide variety of physical, mental and sexual abuse by their employers. In virtually all places they are treated as servants in every way inferior to the employers' own children. When it is not feasible to remove these children from such employment altogether, pressure can be brought on their employers to recognize their responsibilities for all children in their households. In some places advocacy campaigns to educate employers of child domestic workers to this responsibility have claimed some success. At an absolute minimum, employers of child domestics should ensure that all children in their home are in good health and well nourished, clothed with dignity, educated at least to literacy, and given time to rest, play and build friendships with their peers.

Especially in urban areas, many children also work in small informal sector shops. Here also, employer education and advocacy may be the most effective strategy, and employers often can be persuaded to take action to protect children working for them. Only a negligible fraction of child workers are in large factories or in facilities producing for export. However, these employers are very visible and open to international criticism for using child labour, so may be motivated to free themselves of all child workers. Before acting precipitously, employers need to understand the full situation of working children, which can be ascertained from speaking with children, their families, and community leaders and institutions. Especially where children's income is crucial for survival, employers should consider ways to improve working conditions and create work-study opportunities – which are permitted under ILO international standards – for their child workers rather than automatically eliminate them from the workforce. Employers also can adopt safety rules and technology to ensure children do not use dangerous machinery or processes. They can keep the general work environment safe. Educating adults and children about safety measures and providing first aid equipment, protective clothing and other such items at the place of work can make a big difference, as can the provision of services such as education and health care for adults and children. Employers can employ children to do only the lighter jobs and reduce their hours to permit school attendance. Historically, industrialized country employers often have offered schooling and skill training in or near their facilities to allow young people to complete a useful education while holding a part time job and earning essential income. Socially conscious firms could do much to creatively adapt this model to today's needs in developing countries.

NEW ROLES FOR TRADE UNIONS

The trade union movement has perhaps the longest continuous historical commitment against child labour. However, that commitment has been primarily to excluding children from the labour market. For that reason trade unions have been uneasy with strategies that protect children in their work, which they see as perhaps incompatible with a long-term goal of eliminating the economic participation of children altogether. It is hardly surprising that they have been

cool to the self-representation of working children through their own organizations, which they tend to fear as competing "unions" of workers who should not be workers at all. They have been openly hostile to the view of some working children's organizations that children should legally be allowed to engage in safe and non-exploitative work if they need or wish to. Although the union position is understandable and has a long and honorable history, it needs to take account of the economic and social realities of today's world. It may also be incompatible with a child-centred approach to child work and the best interests of working children.

Trade unions should seriously consider adopting a policy that recognizes working children to be an inescapable reality – even if an undesirable one – and extends protective services to them. They could make a major contribution by including working children (perhaps in associate status if not as full members) and helping represent the children's interests to employers and other groups. Trade unions also have the potential to monitor and detect abuses and to campaign for improvements in health, safety and employment practices more generally. Through public education, they can raise public awareness of the hazards to children of specific work situations and specific activities and occupations, and can provide information on alternative employment opportunities. They could thus play a vital role in ensuring that children benefit from, rather than are harmed by, the work they do. They also could offer other services, such as literacy classes, or training in children's and workers' rights, to child workers and their families. Children could benefit greatly from being brought into participation as workers in regular trade union organizations, and as they mature inside the movement they might also become a valuable source of new leadership for the trade unions that treated them well as children.

A NEW CONVENTION AND A NEW OPPORTUNITY

In mid-1998 the International Labour Organization held the first discussion leading toward a new ILO convention that would mobilize nations and the international community to eliminate the very worst forms of child labour, especially those that are tantamount to slavery and that face children with grave harm. Hopefully this convention will be adopted in mid-1999 and ratified by most countries shortly thereafter. At that point, the real work – its implementation – will begin. It is here that the child-centred approach sketched out above can be especially valuable, for it is more likely than are traditional interventions to reach the children in most urgent need and provide them with assistance that will promote rather than undermine their best interests. The discussion and adoption of this proposed convention provides an opportunity to advocate for more child-centred objectives and strategies, making national and international policy makers aware of the alternative opportunities for action that are before them. The potential for governments, NGOs, employers, workers' organizations and other key actors to more effectively support the interests of working children is enormous. To realize this potential, a major reassessment and reformulation of conventional wisdom and ways of doing things is required. It is to be hoped that the design and implementation of the new Convention will ultimately reflect such a reassessment and reformulation.

NOTES

1. For recent reviews of both rich and developing country child labour research and experience see: J. Boyden, B. Ling and W. Myers, (1998) *What Works for Working Children*, Stockholm, Rädda Barnen and UNICEF; C. Grootaert and R. Kanbur, 'Child Labour: An Economic Perspective', *International Labour Review*, Vol. 134, No. 6, 1995, pp. 187-203; C. Grootaert and H. Patrinos, *The Policy Analysis of Child Labour: A Comparative Study*; unpublished working paper, World Bank, January 1998; Addison et al., *Child Labour: A Preliminary View*, unpublished paper, Centre for Development Studies, University of Bath, June 1997, and S. Hobbs and J. McKechnie, (1997) *Child Employment in Britain: A Social and Psychological Analysis*, Edinburgh: The Stationery Office; International Working Group on Child Labour (1998) *Working Children: Reconsidering the Debates*, Amsterdam: Defence for Children International.

2. Heptinstall, E., (1998) 'Children at Work: Healthy or Harmful?' Forthcoming in B. Pettitt (ed.), *Children and Work: Refocusing the Debate*, Save the Children: Child Poverty Action Group, London; Pollack, S.H., Landrigan, P.J. and Mallino, D.L. (1993) 'Child labour in 1990: prevalence and health hazards, *Annual Review of Public Health*, vol. 11, pp.359-75.

3. See: J. Boyden and W. Myers, *Exploring Alternative Approaches to Child Labour: Case Studies from Developing Countries*, Innocenti Occasional Papers, CRS 8, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Florence, Italy, 1995; F. Badry Zalami, 1998, *Forgotten on The Pyjama Trail. A case study of young garment workers in Meknes (Morocco) dismissed from their jobs following foreign media attention*, DCI, Netherlands.

4. Boyden and Myers, op. cit.

5. For example, the Statistical division of the ILO is helping a number of countries to complete child labour surveys that are far more accurate, revealing and useful than is any prior official data. Also, at this moment of writing both the World Bank and Bath University in the UK are preparing major studies derived from living standards surveys in a variety of countries and applying sophisticated economic analysis techniques. Preliminary findings from each suggest the need to reconsider a variety of policy issues. Social scientists taking anthropological and psychological perspectives are preparing important reports and articles for publication by Radda Barnen (the Swedish Save the Children), Childwatch International, and others.

6. This literature is reviewed in J. Boyden, B. Ling and W. Myers, op. cit., Chapter Two.

7. Woodhead, M. (1998), *Children's Perceptions of their Working Lives, a report to Rädda Barnen*, Rädda Barnen, Stockholm.

8. See V. Forastieri (1994), *Strategies to Address Child Labour from a Health Perspective*, Geneva, International Labour Office.

9. For a summation of clinical and research findings relating physical hazards to occupations and working conditions, see V. Forastieri, Ibid.; Examples of more general accounts include N. Burra (1995), *Born to Work: Child Labour in India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press; International Labour Office (1992), *Towards Action Against Child Labour in Zimbabwe*, Geneva, International Labour Office (ILO), Interdepartmental Project on the Elimination of Child Labour; International Labour Office (1992), *Child Labour in Tanzania*, Geneva, International Labour Office (ILO) Interdepartmental Project on the Elimination of Child Labour; Gunn, S. and Ostos, A. (1992), 'Dilemmas in Tackling Child Labour: the case of Scavenger Children in the Philippines', *International Labour Review*, vol. 131, no. 6; pp. 629-646; Bureau of International Labor Affairs, U.S. Department of Labor (1994), *By the Sweat and Toil of Children: the use of Child Labor in American Imports, A Report to the Committees on Appropriations*, United States Congress, volume I; Bureau of International Labor Affairs, U.S. Department of Labor (1995) *By the Sweat and Toil of Children: the use of Child Labor in American Imports, A Report to the Committees on Appropriations*, United States Congress, volume II; Das, P.K., Shukla, K.P. and Ory, F.G. (1992), *An Occupational Health Programme for Adults and Children in the Carpet Weaving Industry, Mirzapur, India: A Case Study in the Informal Sector*, Great Britain, Pergammon Press.

10. Mattoo, G.M., Rauf, A. and Zutshi, M.L. (1986) 'Health Status of School Age Children Employed in Carpet Weaving in Ganderbal Block', *British Journal of Industrial Medicine*, vol. 43: pp. 698-701; Baker, R. with Panter-Brick, C. and Todd, A. (1996) 'Methods Used in Research with Street Children in Nepal', *Childhood*, vol. 3, no. 2.

11. Woodhead (1997) 'Child Work and Child Development: a review and conceptual analysis' unpublished draft report for Rädda Barnen, Centre for Human Development and Learning, Great Britain, The Open University.

12. Kirby, L.D. and Frazer, M. (1997) 'Risk and Resilience in Childhood' in Fraser, M. (ed), *Risk and Resilience in Childhood, an Ecological Perspective*, NASW Press, Washington, pp. 34-49.

13. Ibid

14. It is notable that this analysis draws on recent research on the implications of war on children's psychosocial development. Such research is not available in relation to children's work experiences.

15. For example, see L. Aptekar (1989), 'Characteristics of the Street Children of Colombia', *Child Abuse and Neglect*, Vol. 13, pp. 427–437, and (1991) 'Are Colombian Street

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Children Neglected?', *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Vol. 22, pp. 326-349.

16. For a fuller reading of the Brazil experience, see A. Swift (1997), *Children for Social Change: Education for Citizenship of Street and Working Children in Brazil*, Nottingham, England, Educational Heretics Press.

17. D. Tolfree, (1998), *Old Enough to Work, Old Enough to Have a Say: Different Approaches to Supporting Working Children*, Radda Barnen, Stockholm.

18. T. Addison, et al., (1997), *Child Labour in Pakistan and Ghana: A Comparative Study*, first draft, Centre for Development Studies, Bath, England, University of Bath.

19. E. Schiefelbein (1997), *School-Related Economic Incentives in Latin America: Reducing Drop-Out and Repetition and Combating Child Labour*, Innocenti Occasional Papers, CRS 12, Florence, Italy, UNICEF International Child Development Centre.

20. For example, see M. Woodhead (1998).

21. For example, see R. Anker and H. Melkas (1996), *Economic Incentives for Children and Families to Eliminate or Reduce Child Labour*, Labour Market Policies Branch, Employment Department, Geneva, ILO.

22. See R. Marcus and C. Harper, 1996, *Small Hands: Children in the Working World*, Working Paper 16, Save the Children, London, for a more detailed discussion of poverty-reduction measures.

23. Much of this evidence comes from IPEC's experience.

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child labour

promoting the best interests of working children

revised and updated second edition

Save the Children works for:

- a world which respects and values each child
- a world which listens to children and learns
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This paper focuses on the relationship between children's work and their development. Whilst some forms of work are clearly hazardous to children's health and wellbeing, others may actually enhance their development. Drawing on recent research, the authors, William Myers and Jo Boyden argue that the impact of work on children's development should be the key measure for assessing whether or not it is appropriate for children, and that children themselves can play an important role in helping make such assessments. Just as safe work can help children develop self-confidence and other skills, so can their participation in action to address child labour problems. The paper suggests a number of different measures which can be employed to ensure that children are protected from harmful work and enabled to benefit from safe work.

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